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To Identify the Importance of a Mobile Application for Indonesia's Hidden Beauty

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Abstract:

With recent advances in Internet and mobile technologies, there are increasing demands for electronic access to tourist information systems for service coordination in order to provide better experiences for tourists. One of the popular aspects of tourism for tourists is eco-tourism. Unfortunately, most eco-tourism destinations in Indonesia are in obscure or rural areas that are lacking in telecommunication signals as the area. Given the rapid uptake of smartphone technology and associated applications there is a need to evaluate the current and emerging state of the art and what this means for the tourism domain. Therefore, the nature of this study is to know what eco-tourists in Indonesia need from an offline application in the rural areas due to the lack of web access. This study uses quantitative and qualitative research methods. A questionnaire comprising 150 questions was distributed among eco-tourists in Jakarta. Content analysis was conducted among different websites and applications related to tourism in Indonesia. Providing a good experience with useful apps is helpful to motivate tourists to revisit the destination. This platform can be used by practitioners and researchers as a guideline to design usable mobile applications for eco-tourists and other niche segments of tourism.

Keywords: mobile application; tourism; eco-tourists; internet; Indonesia

JEL Classification: Z32

Introduction

Tourism has become an important economic income for many countries. In 2011, international tourist arrivals grew by over 4% to 980 million (UNWTO, 2012), and contributed 9% or US\$6 trillion to the world's total GDP. Apparently, the global financial crisis that swept the world did not have much of an influence on travel and tourism. Many people still travel for work or for leisure. Traveling can be conducted as individuals or part of a tour group. A tour group usually involves travel agents, which organize all the activities and accommodation during the trip. Individual journeys offer more freedom and flexibility on which places to visit and what activities to do. At a glance, individual journeys seem to be a better option than tour groups but in reality, it is not as convenient as it may seem. Travellers need to know where the main attractions are as well as how to get there. It can become a hindrance, especially for new-comers who are unfamiliar with local streets and transportation.

Indonesia is experiencing growth in the tourism sector has a good prospect to be developed, since the country has natural beauty and hundreds of ethnicities and cultures (Babolian Hendijani, 2016; Osman, 2014). The majority of local and international tourists only recognize famous tourism destinations in Indonesia, such as Bali, Raja Ampat, Komodo Island and Borobudur. On the other hand Indonesia has beautiful obscure and hidden places that are not yet exposed or organized but have a lot of potential as a tourism destination. However remote areas have some drawbacks for the tourists, which are poor phone reception, insufficient information, and patchy internet connection. If the information of an area is limited or not trustworthy, it would not be a consideration for tourists to go to or even to know that the rural area exists. The US Department of Transportation stated if the information about a destination is unavailable or not accurate, the weight of making a decision on a trip to that area becomes apathetic (Peirce & Lappin, 2004).

One of the popular aspects of tourism for both international and local tourists is eco-tourism (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2014). Eco-tourism is defined as tourism that relates to natural-based settings (Diamantis, 2004). The definition of eco-tourists in this study refers to anyone traveling with the primarily motivation of viewing, enjoying, and experiencing nature in a relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural area and undertaking at least one eco-tourism experience during their trip (Tao, Eagles & Smith, 2004). Eco-tourism in Asia has experienced annual growth rates (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Eco-tourism is also promoted by the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia as one of its attractions (Wonderful Indonesia, 2016). Eco-tourism communities in Indonesia are also getting more popular. A previous study shows the increasing number of nature lovers among Indonesians who perform various nature-related activities (Butarbutar & Soemarno, 2013; Hendijani, 2015). Indonesia with an archipelago of 17,508 islands offers eco-tourism resources supply through its long spread of coastlines and forested land. Unfortunately, most eco-tourism destinations in Indonesia are in obscure or rural areas that are lacking in telecommunication signals.

Rural tourism development can give a positive impact to the local economy (Rezvani, 2005; Weaver & Lawton, 2014), but one of the problems identified is that in Indonesia's rural areas the telecommunication signal is weak and unstable, which can be one of the barriers to the development of tourism in the area. Telecommunication development in Indonesia plays an important role as the media which bridges the information between the destinations and the people. Thus the lack of this development will hamper the information flow and slow down the area's exposure and visitation, resulting in slower tourism development in the area itself. Understanding how travelers behave is of critical importance to travel suppliers and tourism authorities for formulating efficient marketing strategies and policies, in order to fully exploit the potential of the destination area (Weaver & Lawton, 2014).

The use of the worldwide web (WWW) or web for travelers is to gather information and plan trips. A previous study mentioned that a planned trip can shift during their travel as many travelers do spontaneous planning or change their itinerary while traveling (Jamal & Robinson, 2009). For this reason, if the internet connection is available for tourists or travelers during their trip, they can change their plans and gather more information on the destination area through their mobile phone. Within tourism, as with other areas of life, smartphone applications have the capacity to reshape dimensions of social life. Tourism can be seen as a network of people, things and places. Smartphones are increasingly playing a role in this hybridized mobility (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). As they guide people both to and around destinations and attractions, reveal new experiential opportunities, make connections with other people, enable fluid temporal arrangements and negotiate immediate tourist needs.

The rapid uptake of mobile technology (Ofcom, 2011) has enabled people to negotiate their day-to-day mobility with increasing fluidity (Ling, 2004) providing scope for ad hoc decision making on-the-go based on networked connectivity between people. An important feature of smartphones is the ability to download and install mobile applications, otherwise known as apps. Applications refer to software, tailor made for mobile devices which improve the delivery of mobile services. The contextual awareness capabilities of smartphone technology are enhancing this ability and the travel domain is providing to be a fertile ground for smartphone application development (Adobe Systems Incorporated, 2010). The smartphone's ubiquitous capability to link people to remote information repositories, exchanging location based data and social information, has rapidly made it a powerful tool for tourists. Smartphones are therefore an inevitable partner for tourism and the tourism context has become a fertile ground for mobile computing (Cheverst et al., 2000). A plethora of novel approaches and mobile phone apps are emerging. This includes tourist-specific applications, travel and transport related applications, social networking applications, and ultimately applications extending social networking to vehicles and the other services tourists need.

With a growing number of mobile users, applications are increasingly influential in tourism travel decision and behavior (Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2011) at all stages of tourism consumption (Hopken et al., 2010). This is especially so given the increasing number of independent tourists who are no longer reliant on packaged tours

(Buhalis & Law, 2008). Unfortunately, there are scarce details regarding travel information to rural sites and a limited number of activities at undeveloped locations (Weaver & Lawton, 2014). Evidently, the information about the rural area destinations in Indonesia is very limited.

Aligned with the lack of telecommunication development, there is also insufficient information about the obscure areas of Indonesia that have a bright prospect to be a potential tourism destination. Information is very critical as it is used in deciding among different alternatives such as destinations, holiday activities, transportation modes, accommodation, departure dates and duration of trips (Hoem, 2006).

Currently there are no travel applications that have collective detailed information on Indonesia's obscure destinations. Given the rapid uptake of smartphone technology and associated applications there is a need to evaluate the current and emerging state of the art and what this means for the tourist travel domain. Since smartphones and their associated applications are useful in all forms of tourism travel arrangements, therefore, the nature of this study is to know what eco-tourists in Indonesia need from an online or offline application in the rural areas due to the lack of web access by the weak signal.

The finding of this study gives an alternative approach to encounter the telecommunication signal problem as one of the barriers for tourists' source of information in the rural areas in Indonesia. As a medium of information, the application will also benefit the marketing perspective, because it will also be useful to promote the area through the application itself. The application will be a standpoint for the targeted tourist as the hidden jewel finder and guidance. Other than for the tourist and tourism marketers, on a larger scale this study will be beneficial for other businesses and government organizations to have joint cooperation with the application and conduct promotions together. This study contribution to knowledge lies in adding to the understanding of how evolving mobile technology mediates travel decisions in the tourism domain.

1. Research Method

The scope of this study focuses on Peucan Island, as the object chosen for the 'obscure place' sample in Indonesia. Peucang Island is the eastern part of Ujung Kulon National Park area and is located on the Western tip of Java island. This island is one of the many obscure places in Indonesia. The target sample in this study was international eco-tourists in Indonesia. A questionnaire in four parts was given to participants in different places such as in universities, hotels and malls. It was asked from the participants about their thoughts on four tourism sectors (accommodation, food & beverage, transportation, and attractions) and their decision-making elements for each, frequency of use of smartphones and the relation between their smartphone utilization and travel-related activities. The questions were based on Likert scale in which 1=very unimportant to 5=very important. The questionnaire was distributed among 150 participants.

This study used content analysis to measure websites and phone applications promoting Indonesia and other destinations as it is a quantitative, objective, systematic method (Veal, 2006) and a way of measuring words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated (Neuman, 2003). Therefore, content analysis is a mechanism for counting occurrences of phrases, text or images (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Content analysis was also conducted in order to have more knowledge related to this study. First the authors analyzed tourism applications available in the market. Background literatures was analyzed to get a better understanding of the relationship of smartphone utilization and the tourism industry. The authors then explored the data from the web to gain insights of the tourists' needs in an application. In terms of sampling, the top ten websites and mobile applications which promote Indonesia or other destination were chosen to know about the current situation of destination promotion which can be useful for eco-tourists. The data collected by questionnaire was analyzed by SPSS software and data of the content analysis was conducted by the researchers. Data collection was conducted during the period of March to April 2016.

2. Results

Out of 150 distributed questionnaires, 77 respondents were male (51%) and 73 were female (49%). Most participants (52%) mentioned they got information regarding eco-tourism activities from the internet, and the rest got their information from their family/friends (36%), campus (8%) and from their colleagues (4%). When asked about the source of information during the trip from multiple choice questions, the answers were internet (N=138), friends/family (N=99), guide books (N=90), smartphone applications (N=81) and travel agents (N=57). The social media the participants used as their source of information were Facebook (N=87), Instagram (N=84), Twitter (N=60), Pinterest (N=51) and blogs (N=48).

When asked about their most favorable activities participation during the trip, the results depicted adventure (80%), cultural experience (71.4%), national park visitation (60%), natural experience (57.1%), wildlife adventure (54.3%), camping (28.6%), marine (25.7%), and conservation of environment (23.9%).

The participants mentioned that the most important type of information they needed from application features are respectively attraction (N=144), accommodation (N=140), transportation (N=138), and food and beverage (N=137). When they explained in detail, the most important aspects of accommodation are prices, accessibility of location and facilities. Meanwhile from the results, the study found that the important features of the food and beverage sector are prices, accessibility and variety of dishes and drinks. The factors that are very important in the transportation section are accessibility, flexibility of routes and schedule, and facilities. Lastly, the factors that are important in the attraction and destination section are prices, accessibility, facilities and uniqueness.

This study examined the content and functions of the top 6 Indonesia's tourism websites (visitindonesia.co.id, pesona.indonesia.travel, kemenpar.co.id, allindonesiatravel.com, Indonesia-tourism.com, and Indonesia.travel). Specifically, the purpose of the study was to determine the common contents of the websites and if they were promoting eco-tourism and in detailed information for eco-tourists on their sites. The majority of the websites did not describe eco-tourism directly, nor did they explain any aspects of eco-tourism. Explanations about how eco-tourists might be involved in the community, how it helps or protects the local environment, and how it educates tourists and locals about eco-tourism, were lacking. After conducting a search for "eco-tourism", some websites provided information about places, destinations and current events. Most of the websites provided no information regarding an eco-tourism mission. Part of the eco-tourism philosophy is involvement in the local community – giving jobs to locals or providing education about conserving the environment. Basically, all sites provided a "contact us" section on their website, in one form or another. Of interest is that only 50% of the websites provided a physical address. Instead of a physical address, most of the sites chose to either offer a map showing the location of the place, or at least information on how to get to the place. The choice to use a map or directions instead of an address is an important one because potential guests will not know where in Indonesia a place is located simply by looking at an address. A location map, however, shows exactly where in the country the place is situated. This proves very helpful to guests when determining where they want to stay. In addition to using maps, the websites also marketed places with the use of pictures, descriptions, 'how to get there' and 'getting around'. These websites included pictures of the place, common areas, beaches, flora and fauna, and Indonesian wildlife. Descriptions of what services the place offered were also done well. As with using maps, this is helpful to potential guests. It is important for the guest to know exactly what they are getting when they stay. A website is one of the primary faces of an organization towards its customers, suppliers, employees, and partners and it can be a powerful tool for brand awareness, product information, and customer service. These considerations should be well understood by national tourism organizations.

This study also reviewed different mobile application regarding tourism attractions in Indonesia. The content and functions of the top 5 free Indonesia tourism mobile applications (Indonesia Tourism Forum, Wonderful Indonesia, Pesona Indonesia eBrochure, Indonesia in Your Hand, and Discover Indonesia) were reviewed. The tourism apps give users access to a rich, interactive guide that the tourism industry offers. Using the geo-location of the phone, users are able to see where they are in relation to all the attractions, restaurants and events around them. Similar to the websites, the apps studied mostly focused on information dissemination, navigation, ticketing and upselling. Gamification, augmented reality and social interaction functions in the app are under-developed, thus, opportunities for co-creation using the apps investigated are absent. GPS navigation and map guidance is no doubt the most important feature of mobile apps. Almost all of the apps have provided this feature. Review of these applications indicated they also lack information if they want to be used by eco-tourists. Offline guided tours are a very useful function for both outbound and domestic tourists, travel routes, attraction tickets, travel and vacation, products in the mobile phone client. Traveling to obscure places may be uncomfortable and can take several hours. All of these aspects are the essentials that the eco-tourists want to see in websites, and mobile applications to describe.

Conclusion

This study has provided a general description of Indonesia's tourism and the potential destinations in Indonesia, of which some are known to be obscure. The reason why they are obscure is because of the limited information about the destination, on either the internet or local knowledge, due to the fact it is located quite remotely in rural areas. Moreover, the rural areas are underdeveloped so the telecommunications signals in those destinations are poor. In view of the scarce information and the poor signal, this study proposed an information platform that can be both a marketing tool and an information source. In the case of this study, the platform is information for creating a smartphone application, which can be used without an internet connection.

Technology in the tourism context is rapidly evolving and designers, together with users, are realizing new opportunities to mediate travel experiences. Technology innovators have recognized the potential of smartphones within the tourism field (Hopken et al., 2010) and research in the computer field is well established. On the other hand, research on the role and impact of mobile media in the tourism travel domain, and transport domain more widely, is in its infancy. This study contributes knowledge on how evolving mobile technology mediates travel decisions. The ability to access place-related information and to visualize the spatial relativity of tourist facilities, resources and activities leads to knowledge rich visitors.

The finding of this study can be used by researchers as well as practitioners as a usability guideline for mobile applications. Practitioners can use the findings of this study to determine which usability dimensions should be considered when designing and measuring usability levels for mobile applications. Creating a specific application by designers can be useful for this niche segment of tourists in order to reduce the need for car travel, avoid unnecessary trips, reduce the distance traveled and time spent in congestion both to and from destination areas. Researchers may extend this study by investigating how these dimensions found in this study can be operationalized as specific measurements.

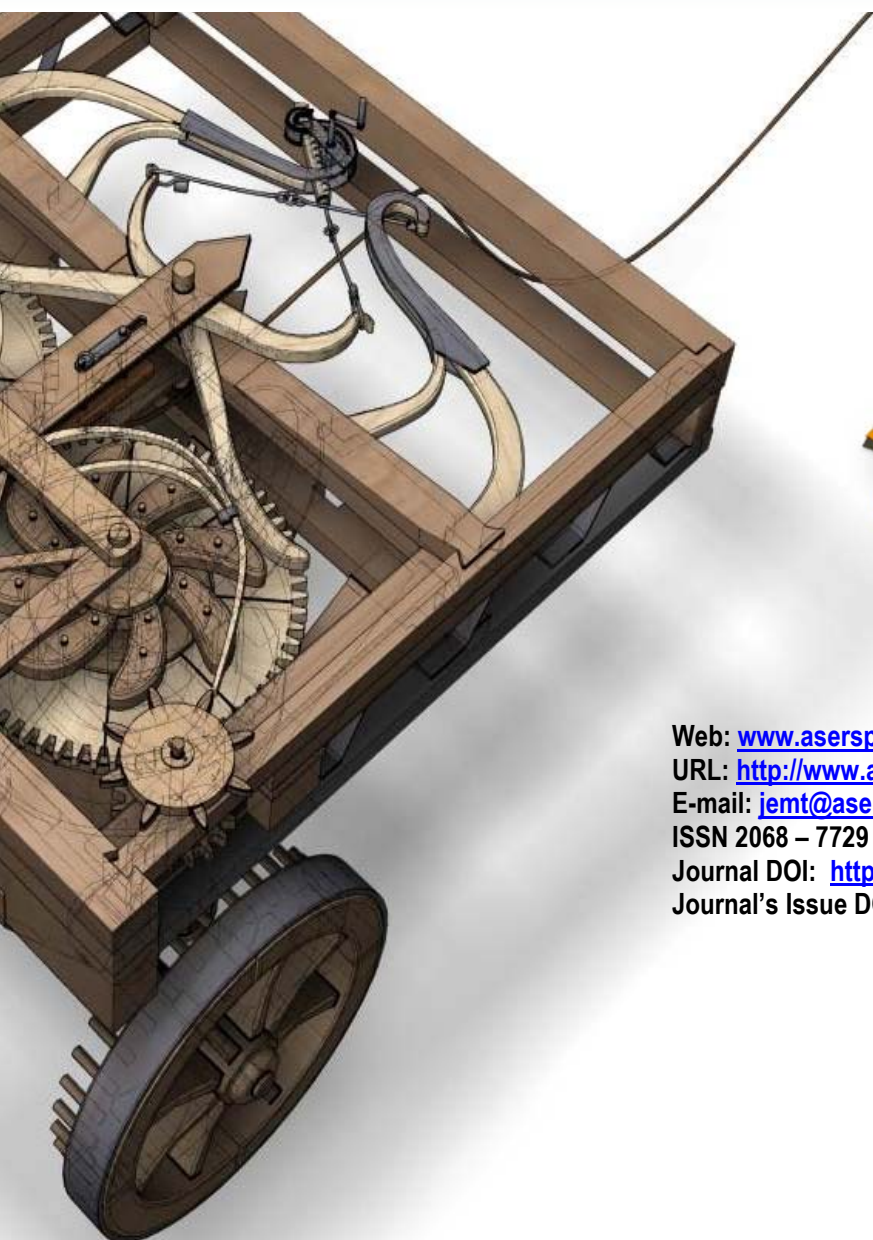
However, the current study is not without limitations. First, this study was conducted in Peucang Island. While it may be valid, the procedure may not capture tourists in other eco-tourism sites. Future research may consider carrying out surveys on different sites to have more detailed information. Second, the current study only investigated the needs of eco-tourists from an application. Thus, another avenue of future work would be conducting extensive studies among different types of niche tourists such as food travelers, cultural tourists, and historical tourists to name but a few.

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